HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS

FOR AADAC ITEMS

IN 1984 EDMONTON AREA STUDY

Prepared by

Edward Sawka

Policy and Planning Unit

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1. INTRODUCTION

a. The Edmonton Area Study

AADAC contracted with the Population Lab, University of Alberta, to have 11 items on alcohol use and drinking and driving included in the 1984 Edmonton Area Study (E.A.S).

The E.A.S., which uses structured questions and face-to-face interviews, is an annual survey with a randomly selected sample of Edmonton residents 18 years of age and older on various topical issues and social questions of ongoing interest.

The sample consisted of 560 addresses. Out of that number 452 residents granted interviews, resulting in a response rate of 81%.

b. Demographic Profile

The final sample of 452 respondents contained about equal proportions of males (51%) and females (49%). They had an average age of 38.5 years, were mainly married (51%) or single (24%), and had completed high school (21%) or attained some post-secondary training (including technical-trades) up to a bachelor's degree (46%).

About two-thirds (65%) of respondents said they worked either full-time or part-time outside of the home. The most frequently cited occupations were in the clerical (20%) and service (13%) areas. Eight per cent were unemployed. The sample's median household income was in the $30,000-$31,999 category.

2. ALCOHOL-RELATED ITEMS

a. Alcohol Use

A majority of respondents (83%) indicated that they did drink alcoholic beverages.

b. Drinking and Driving

The sample contained a large subgroup comprised of respondents who were both drinkers and active drivers (n=325, 72%) of whom 195 persons (43% of the entire sample) said they had driven after drinking in the last year. Of that subgroup of drinkers and active drivers (n=325), 70% of them accurately estimated that they could consume from 0 to 3 drinks in 3 hours and still be fit to drive.[1] The remaining 30% provided an estimate falling in the range of 4-12 drinks.

[1]Calculations indicate that, after 3 hours, the blood alcohol concentrations (BAC) of a 125 lb. female and 150 lb. male should be below the legal limit of 80 mg%.

When asked to estimate how often in an average month over the last year they had at least one drink then, within an hour, drove a motor vehicle, this subgroup of 325 individuals responded as follows:

39%-never
19%-once/month or less
24%-2-4 times/month
18%-5 or more times/month

On a follow-up question these drinking drivers estimated the frequency with which they felt they had consumed enough alcohol to be legally impaired then drove a motor vehicle. Their responses were:

65%-never
6%-less once/month
13%-once/month
10%-2-4 times/month
5%-5 or more times/month

c. Dealing With Impaired Drivers

Half of the sample (49%) felt that it was to some degree unlikely that an impaired driver would be stopped by the police. About one-fifth (20%) indicated that either outcome was equally likely and 28% believed that the impaired driver would likely get caught.

Almost everyone (97%) said that he or she would intervene if someone in their family were about to drive when impaired. As for actions these interventionists were willing to take, the following pattern emerged:

78% - try to persuade person not to drive
88% - offer to drive or suggest taking a taxi
81% - suggest they stay overnight or go to hotel
49% - try to take keys away
20% - physically restrain the person
10% - call the police

Respondents were asked if, over the last year, they had been in a situation where a friend or someone in the family was about to drive while impaired. Over one-third (n=184, 41%) answered that they had such an experience.

Of this group, 94% (n=172) said they took action with this impaired friend or family member.

With what actions did they respond? The following pattern emerged:

63% - tried to persuade person not to drive
69% - offered to drive or suggested taking a taxi
54% - suggested they stay overnight or go to a hotel
24% - tried to take keys away
3% - physically restrained the person
0% - called the police

Respondents were asked to identify a measure that they thought would be the single-most effective way to prevent impaired driving in Alberta. The four most frequently cited measures were:

44% - increase penalties
18% - increase enforcement
14% - conduct ad campaigns to change attitudes
9% - teach about alcohol in schools

The same categories, though in different order, were also preferred as the second-most effective way to prevent impaired driving in Alberta:

28% - increase enforcement
16% - teach about alcohol in the schools
14% - increase penalties
11% - conduct ad campaign to change attitudes

Regarding the price of alcohol in Alberta, 47% felt it is priced about right, 9% regarded the price as too low, and 33% said it was priced too high.

3. DISCUSSION

The E.A.S. is a carefully executed survey with a representative sample and the information that it provides confirms and extends our knowledge of local public opinion on drinking and driving.

The study's main limitation is geographic: it represents the views of Edmonton resident only, and not of all Albertans.

The data reflect a distinct middle-class view. The sample, after all, was substantially made up of people between 25 and 44 years of age who maintained stable living patterns: single or married, working, moderate income.

Over 80% of the sample consumed alcohol and 72% (325 respondents) were both drinkers and active drivers. Many of this subgroup accurately estimated the number of drinks they could have in three hours and stay under the legal limit; 70% of them gave an answer of three or fewer drinks.

According to their self-reports, two-thirds of these drivers never drove after having imbibed enough to feel impaired. However, about one-quarter of them (23%) said they did this from 1-4 times in an average month over the last year. Another 5% said they did this 5 or more times per month.

These findings emphasize that drinking to the point of probable legal impairment, then driving, was a behavior that many drivers in this subgroup did knowingly with considerable frequency.

In terms of intervening with intoxicated people who are about to get behind the wheel, we would expect this sample to be fairly responsive. Indeed, over 90% said they would get involved, indicating most often that they would offer to drive or suggest taking a taxi (88%) and least often that they would call the police (10%).

But less than half of the sample disclosed that they had actually been in a situation where someone close to them was about to drive when impaired. Under these circumstances, there was a drop of anywhere from 10-27 percentage points in interventions.

It is noteworthy that the more socially acceptable interventions of trying to persuade the person or making a helpful offer or suggestion were cited by more than half of the respondents while only rarely did they mention the physical and more stringent tactics.

The E.A.S. results also confirm that in Edmonton, as in other jurisdictions, there is considerable support for taking a harder line with impaired drivers both in terms of penalties and law enforcement. Promotional and educational activities designed to encourage public attitudes against drinking and driving are also favored.